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## Oman

# Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and

# Standards

## Country Report

## 2003

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### Report Highlights:

**This is an updated version of Oman FAIRS report for the Sultanate of Oman. This report provides extensive information on Oman's labeling and shelf life regulations, food additives, colors and preservatives.**

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Includes PSD changes: No  
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**SULTANATE OF OMAN: FOOD IMPORT REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS**

Last Updated: September 28, 2003

**DISCLAIMER:** This report has been prepared by the Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, U.A.E. for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, the information provided may be dated, as some import requirements are subject to frequent change. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters ensure that all necessary customs clearance requirements have been verified with local authorities through your Omani importer before the sale conditions are finalized.

**FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS ALWAYS SUBJECT TO THE RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY THE COUNTRY OF IMPORT AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.**

**A. GENERAL**

The Sultanate of Oman is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) which also includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The GCC member states have unified several food standards, and are working to harmonize all remaining food import standards, including labeling and shelf-life regulations, by the end of 2005. The GCC states have agreed to base their regulations and standards on directives, rules and regulations issued by the FAO's Codex Alimentarius in order to remain in line with international practices. This includes matters related to biotechnology and novel foods.

The GCC took a major step towards regulatory harmonization with issuance of Gulf Standard (GS) 9/1995, which revised previous label regulations for prepackaged food products, and GS 150/1993, Part I, which established shelf-life standards for a number of food items. Oman adopted GS 9/1995 as Omani Standard (OS) 58/1995 and GS 150/1993, Part I, as OS 246/1993. This latter standard is still being discussed by GCC member countries as to the need for further modification. GS 150/1993, Part II, will not be formally ratified until disagreement on Part I is resolved. After joining the WTO, Oman accepts manufacturers' recommended shelf life.

On June 26, 2000, the Omani Minister of Commerce issued Ministerial Decree # 74/2000 which relates to food labeling and safety. This decree, said to complement OS 58/1995, contains the following main components:

**Article (1):** Labeling information on food and food products shall be in accordance with the Codex General Standard for the labeling of prepackaged foods (Codex Stan.1) and all information shall be written in Arabic and any other language beside Arabic.

**Article (2):** Food products shall not contain alcohol, pork, lard or their derivatives.

**Article (3):** Definitions and limits of food additives, contaminants, residue of pesticides and residue of veterinary drugs in food and food products shall be in accordance with Codex Alimentarius standards.

**Article (4):** Whatever contradicts this decree shall be canceled.

Such wording created slight confusion over Oman's commitment to the GCC on one hand, and its commitment to the WTO on the other. An Omani high level official acknowledged that the country understands that by attempting to follow CODEX regulations simultaneously with GCC standards could cause slight confusion among third parties. However, the official noted Oman is hopeful that time will allow GCC member states will voluntarily come into compliance with its WTO commitments. Towards that end, all GCC member states have agreed to adopt CODEX regulations governing the use of food coloring agents and other food additives.

The Directorate for Specifications and Measurements, Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCAI), is responsible for formulating food safety regulations and standards. Regulations become law only after an official decree is issued by the Minister of Commerce and Industry. Usually, a grace period of up to six months is granted prior to enforcement of new regulations.

## **1. GENERAL FOOD LAWS**

Regulatory enforcement on food products is divided between the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the various municipalities within the Sultanate of Oman. The MAF is responsible for inspecting live animals and plants, red meat, poultry meat, agricultural materials, timber and grains and other unprocessed agricultural products at all points of entry into the country. The Health Quarantine Department, the MOH, is responsible for inspecting all imported semi- and fully-processed food products, including sugar. Although some municipality officials are based at the country's ports of entry, their role in inspection of imported foods is very marginal. Their main responsibility is to inspect food products that are available on the local market.

Products shipped in bulk must meet Omani labeling requirements and must be accompanied by small, easy-to-handle samples for possible laboratory testing. For example, edible oils imported in bulk are required to be accompanied by a small (one liter) sample of the product. The sample container must contain a label which meets all Omani labeling requirements.

Compliance disputes are reviewed by a committee comprised of representatives from the MAF, the Standard and Measurements Directorate of the MOCAI, the MOH, the chamber of commerce and appropriate municipality bureaus. Trade contacts report that consignments rejected for minor labeling and other infractions may be granted a one-time waiver, provided the product is found to be safe for human consumption.

To facilitate entry, U.S. suppliers are encouraged to work closely with their local importer agent to obtain pre-export approval for labels, particularly for new-to-market products, and to ensure that their products meet all local food import regulations.

## 2. LABELING REQUIREMENTS

Label regulations are contained in OS 58/1995 and Oman Decree #74/2000. The regulations require that all food packages carry labels showing the following information. This information must be provided in Arabic or in bilingual labels - Arabic and any second language, and must appear on the original label or primary packaging.

- Product and brand names
- Country of origin
- Ingredients, in descending order of proportion
- Additives, contaminants, any residues of pesticide or veterinary drugs
- Origin of animal fat (e.g., beef fat), if applicable
- Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids)
- Production and expiry dates
- Name and address of manufacturer, packer, distributor, exporter, importer or vendor
- Nutritional information for foods for special dietary uses
- Special storage, transportation and preparation instructions, if any.

### Language On Labels

Bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g. Arabic/English). Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of original Arabic or bilingual labels, provided the sticker:

- Complies with all labeling requirements and is applied by the manufacturer;
- Does not conceal required information on the original label;
- Does not contradict information on the original label;
- Is extremely difficult to remove.

Unofficially, small consignments may be exempted from the Arabic language requirement. In addition, trade contacts report that current enforcement of the Arabic requirement is erratic and products with English labels and no stickers are being allowed entry. This may be due to the fact that a significant quantity of imported food arrives via the United Arab Emirates which does not enforce Arabic labeling. According to a high level official with the Ministry of Health, if a consignment arrives without an Arabic label, the Ministry of Commerce may waive this requirement on a one-time basis only or request the importer to add Arabic stickers to the products before releasing the products.

While production and expiry (P/E) dates are a requirement (per OS 58/1995), Oman's joining of the WTO has led to a more relaxed approach towards P/E dating by Omani officials. Currently, only perishable products such as eggs and dairy products are required to bear dates of production and expiry, while self-stable products, such as packaged food, may only carry expiry dates. If products would be destined for another Gulf state, the supplier would be advised to include the P/E dates on the original packaging as stickers containing such information would not be accepted.

## **Product Dating:**

Dates must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. They may not be printed on a sticker. While technically these dates must be printed in Arabic, dates printed in English or English/Arabic are accepted. However, exporters should be aware the dates in this case should be the same. Any discrepancy between the dates will lead to the rejection of the product/shipment.

Bar coding is not permitted in lieu of P/E dates and a label may not contain more than one set of P/E dates. The dates must be printed in the following order, as determined by the shelf-life of the product, in either digit or text format:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf-life of 6 months or less;
- Month/year for products with a shelf-life longer than 6 months.

As noted earlier, Omani officials recommend that OS 246/1993 be used as a guide when determining the shelf life of a product for the Oman market.

All speciality food product labels, such as labels for diet, health and infant foods must contain detailed ingredient information (vitamins, minerals, supplements, additives including food colors, preservatives, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams, health warnings if any, and instructions for proper use and storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is permitted. Baby foods must be cleared by the Medicine Control Section, Ministry of Health. A permit is usually required for every shipment.

Most products shipped in bulk or institutional-sized containers must comply with labeling requirements. P/E dates are not required for certain products including fresh fruits and vegetables and fresh bakery items as indicated by OS 246/1993. Expiry dates are not required for products deemed to be extremely shelf-stable such as salt and sugar. Nevertheless, it is recommend that these products carry production dates as importers will often request such information be included on the product package. Products arriving clearly marked as samples not intended for sale, are exempt from label regulations.

### **3. FOOD ADDITIVES**

In general, Oman accepts any food or coloring additive approved by the Codex Alimentarius, even those additives that are not listed in GS 23/1998. Under this standard, the common name and index number of color additives contained in a product must be noted on the label. European "E" numbers are permitted. (See Appendix A for a list of approved color additives).

According to trade contacts, rarely is a U.S. food product rejected due to the unauthorized use of an additive.

### **4. PESTICIDE AND OTHER CONTAMINANTS**

Oman adopted GS 382/1994 for "Maximum Limits of Pesticide Residues in Agricultural and Food Products - Part I" and GS 383/1994 for "Maximum Limits of Pesticide Residues in Agricultural and Food Products - Part II" as OS 482/1994 and 483/1994. Codex Alimentarius standards are used as guidelines. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries monitors for residues.

## **5. OTHER REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS**

All food consignments must be accompanied by:

- 1) Health certificate issued by the appropriate government agency in the country of origin that attests to the product's fitness for human consumption.
- 2) Halal slaughter certificate issued by an approved Islamic center in the country of origin for all meat and poultry products.

These certificates must be notarized by "both" the Arab chamber of commerce and the Omani embassy or one of its consulates in the exporting country. If the latter is not present, another Arab diplomatic mission would be acceptable.

Poultry products are randomly tested for salmonella. Currently, and in the absence of an Omani regulation stipulating salmonella limits, a guideline of a maximum of 20 percent presence is permitted in any drawn chicken samples. If salmonella is found in more than 20 percent of the sample, the shipment will be rejected.

Imports of alcoholic beverages are restricted to 6 licenced companies. Non-alcoholic beer imports are subject to a pre-import licence issued from the MOCAI. Samples are to be provided for laboratory testing. When a permit is issued, tests of the imported beer must match the test results of the approved sample. Pork and pork product imports are not restricted, although they are subject to 100 percent import duty. Pork and Pork products must be retailed in a separate section of the retail outlet that is headed with a sign "Pork products, not for Moslems".

There are no special packaging or container size requirements for food products. The MOH informs that radiation and dioxin free certificates are no longer required for imported foods of European and Asian origin. Currently, Oman does not have any regulations governing the importation of irradiated food products, but officials have said that such products would probably be prohibited from import.

Local municipality food safety inspectors randomly check food products in the market regardless of origin. In addition to visual label inspection, samples are analyzed to verify the accuracy of the label versus actual product ingredients. If a discrepancy is found, the importer is informed and the product removed from the market and destroyed at the importer's expense.

If the infraction is severe (e.g. the label does not identify the pork in a product) or an importer is discovered to have intentionally altered or falsified a product's label, the product may be banned from the market for a specified period of time, usually six to twelve months.

## **6. OTHER STANDARDS**

There are no special requirements regulating the import of food samples. Samples destined for food shows and other types of promotional events are exempt from local label and shelf-life regulations. Such shipments, however, must be accompanied by a health certificate, as well as an invoice stating that the product is not for sale and has no commercial value.

Except for nutritional labeling requirements, there are no special regulations governing imports of speciality products such as infant, diet or health foods.

## **7. COPYRIGHT/TRADEMARK LAWS**

The Sultanate of Oman's Decree number 38/2000 gave legal recognition of international copyright laws and the protection of trademarks. The Ministry of Commerce is responsible for brand registration, which usually can be completed in a short time.

In 1996, an agency decree was issued that permitted the importation of food products by importers other than the registered agent. Oman does permit parallel imports.

## **8. IMPORT PROCEDURES**

The port of Sultan Qaboos in Muscat is the main port in Oman. Over the last few years, the port has expanded and upgraded significantly, particularly the container terminal. To keep up with infra structural changes, port inspection services (foods and customs) has improved and reduced the time requirement to clear food consignments to 1-2 hours.

Recently, the Port of Salalah underwent a major expansion and development program. This port facilitates Omani trading with Yemen and other East African countries. The Port of Sohar, the third largest port in Oman, is expected to receive a face lift in the near future which should improve the country's ability to receive and swiftly clear products.

Imported food documentation requirements include the following:

- Commercial invoice
- Packing list
- Bill of Lading
- Health certificate
- Halal slaughter certificate (for meat and poultry products only)
- Certificate of Origin
- Import permit from the respective Ministry

The Halal and health certificates must be notarized, as noted in section 5 above. In addition, the MAF

requires prior written approval before import of agricultural products it inspects - live animals and plants, red meat, poultry meat, agricultural materials, timber and grains and other unprocessed agricultural products.

There is no appeal process for food products rejected as unfit for human consumption. Rejected consignments must be destroyed by local officials or re-exported to the country of origin.

Products rejected for minor labeling infractions may be allowed entry upon appeal. Trade contacts report that new-to-market and ethnic food products are normally allowed entry on a one-time basis, despite minor labeling infractions. Infractions of P/E date requirements (e.g., missing production and expiry dates, dates printed in the wrong order and dates printed on stickers rather than original labels) normally result in rejection of the product. Products arriving without date of production might be permitted provided date of expiry is mentioned. Disputed products may be stored at the port of entry or under bond outside the port until a final resolution is announced.

Arabic label is required. However, a high level official at the port stated that the Ministry of Commerce would allow the importer to add Arabic stickers to the label to permit the sale of the product.

Processed or value added food products are subject to a five percent import duty, ad valorem CIF basis. Pork and pork products, alcoholic beverages and dried lemons face a 100 percent import duty. Oman also levies a 25 percent protective tariff on imports of bananas and edible oils in retail pack, and a 20 percent tariff on imported dates. GCC-origin products are exempt from all import duties.

Imports of basic commodities such as rice, sugar, wheat, wheat flour, corn, barley, fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh and chilled meat and poultry, bulk edible oils, powdered milk, seedlings and planting seeds are exempt from import duties.

## B. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A. LIST OF PERMITTED FOOD COLORS - PRODUCTS APPROVED BY CODEX AND ARE NOT LIST BELOW WILL BE ACCEPTED IN OMAN.

#### A. Natural Food Colors

<i>Color/Description</i>	<i>International Number</i>	<i>Other Names</i>
<b><u>Red to Yellow Colors</u></b>		
Carmine	120	Cochineal, Carminic Acid
Annato extracts	160B	Bixin, Norbixin
Beta Carotene	160A	Carotene blend
Lycobine	160D	
Beta-Apo-8-carotenal	160E	
Beta-Apo-8-carotenoid acid	160F	
Lutein	161B	
Carrot oil	None	
Beet root red	162	Betanine

#### **Red to Purple Shade**

Anthocyanins	163(i)	
Grape skin extract	163(ii)	
Blackcurrant extract	163(iii)	Enocianina
Beet powder	None	
Paprika	None	
Paprika oleoresin	160C	

#### **Orange and Yellow Colors**

Saffron	None	Natural yellow 6
Turmeric powder	100(ii)	
Curcumin	100(i)	
Turmeric oleoresin	None	
Riboflavin	101(i)	
Riboflavin-5-Sodium Phosphate	101(ii)	

#### **Green Colors**

Chlorophylls	140	Chlorophyllins
Chlorophyll copper complex	141(i)	
Sodium and potassium salts of	141(ii)	

chlorophyll copper complex

**Brown Colors**

Plain caramel	150A
Caustic sulfite caramel	150B
Ammonia caramel	150C
Ammonia sulfite caramel	150D

**Black Color**

Activated vegetable carbon	153
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**Inorganic Colors**

Titanium dioxide	171	Food white 6
Iron oxides	172	

***B. Artificial Food Colors*****Red Colors**

Azorubine	122	Carmosine, Food red 3
Allura Red 17	129	Food red 40

**Yellow Colors**

Sunset yellow FCF	110	Food yellow 3, Food orange S, Yellow 6 for food, drugs and cosmetics
Tartrazine	102	Food yellow 4, Yellow 5 for food, drugs and cosmetics

**Brown Color**

Chocolate brown HT	155	Food brown 3
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**Green Color**

Fast green FCF	143	Food green 3, Green 3 for food, drugs and cosmetics
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**Blue Colors**

Indigotin	132	Carmine indigo, Blue 2 for food, drugs and cosmetics, Food blue 1
Brilliant blue FCF	133	Food blue 2, Blue 1 for food, drugs and

cosmetics

**Black Color**

Brilliant black BN

151

Food black 1, Black PN

**C. Coloring Matters Allowed for Use in Selected Foods**

International Number	Color	Food	Maximum Limit
127	Erythrosine	Cherry and Products	None
128	Red 2 G	Sausages	20 ppm
161G	Canthaxanthin	Cooked Sausages	30 ppm
		Frozen Foods	100 ppm
173	Aluminum	External Cover for Cake and Pasta	According to Good Production Practice
174	Silver	External Cover for Sweets	According to Good Production Practice
175	Gold	External Cover for Sweets	According to Good Production Practice
180	Lithotrubine	Cheese Covering	According to Good Production Practice
None	Orange B	Sausage and Frankfurters Covering	150 ppm
None	Citrus Red 2	Orange Peel	2 ppm

Parts per million = ppm

**D. Recently Prohibited Colors**

International Number	Color	Remarks
104	Quinolin yellow	Prohibited in all food products
124	Ponceau 4R	Prohibited in all food products



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## **APPENDIX B. REGULATORY AGENCIES/USEFUL CONTACTS**

Mrs. Aida Ryami, Director General  
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